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A RESEALABLE BAG FOR FILLING WITH FOOD
PRODUCT (S) AND METHOD

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This is a continuation-in-part patent application of U.S. Patent Parent Application Serial No. 09/431,732 filed on 1 November 1999 which application is now pending and not abandoned, and commonly owned by the assignee hereof.

Background of the Invention

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The present invention relates generally to the field of reclosable bags and more specifically to reclosable bags that use or incorporate tamper evident, hermetic seal, and reclosable fastener assemblies or mechanisms of the slider or zipper type. The present invention is particularly concerned with a reclosable bag that may be filled with a food product at a factory or food processing plant and then sealed to protect the food product until such time as a customer purchases the reclosable bag and opens it to access the food product within.

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Reclosable, typically flexible, containers are well known in the art. Such containers normally comprise a bag-like structure made from a folded web of material, like thermoplastic film. These types of containers may also include reclosable zipper structures, as well as interlocking male and female zipper elements fused, extruded, or attached to the bag sidewalls.

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Alternatively, the reclosable zipper structures, mechanisms, or assemblies may also be identified as slider closure systems, i.e., a closure system for slider bags and form, fill and seal technology that contain two tracks that can be interlocked and a separate part (a slider) that rides on the tracks and is used to open and/or close the tracks. The bag-like structure is created when the thermoplastic film is folded, sealed, and severed along its exposed edges.

Reclosable bags are a great convenience to the consumer. This is especially true where the food product or material contained within the bag is of a type that may not all be consumed at once, for example, shredded cheese, sliced cheese, cheese, processed cheese, deli meats, snack foods, vegetables, fruits, sweets, etc. A problem with these types of bags is achieving a design in which the food product is hermetically sealed against oxygen, atmospheric intrusion or transmission, bacteria, molds, and/or other sources of contamination, while also providing features that help to disclose to the consumer evidence of tampering without substantially interfering with the ease of use of the bag.

In addressing this problem it is also desired to achieve a design that is easy to manufacture and may be used in combination with known types of packaging machinery that use form, fill, and seal technology such as Horizontal Form Fill and Seal (HFFS) machines or Vertical Form Fill and Seal (VFFS) machines. It is also desired to achieve a design that may optionally be used in combination with Horizontal Flow Wrapper (HFW) machines; e.g., J-WRAP machines presently available from Jones Automation Company, Inc. of Beloit, Wisconsin.

Tamper evident packaging may also require the use of several pieces of film, which must then be connected to

each other. This can make manufacturing of the reclosable bag more complicated.

It is one of the objectives of the present invention to provide a reclosable bag that may be manufactured using known packaging machinery. As previously, noted, such known machinery includes HFFS machines, VFFS machines, and HFW machines. Additionally, as will be apparent to a person of skill in the art after reading the present disclosure contained herein thermoform type machines like the one disclosed in US Patent No. 4,240,241 could also be used to practice the present invention disclosed herein, after appropriate modification as the disclosure herein will make apparent.

It is also an objective to perform the manufacturing task using only one piece of parent film in combination with a reclosable zipper assembly.

Further, it is an objective of the invention to provide the manufacturer with the option of including some or all the features of tamper resistance or evidence, hermetic seal, and ease of use in the reclosable bag that is produced.

Another objective, especially with slider or zipper type structures or sliding type zippers or fasteners is ease of use. While a sliding type zipper structure is itself relatively easy to use, the bag structures include sidewalls or fin portions that extend up past the sliding type zipper structure. This interferes with the consumer's access to the food, makes it difficult to see the zipper structure, and also makes it more difficult to easily operate the zipper mechanism. This is especially true if the person opening and closing the bag is disabled, has arthritis, or another ailment, which limits the manual dexterity of that person.

Additionally, increased ease of access to the food product is an objective because the larger the zipper structure and its associated elements the smaller the opening left to the consumer to access the food product.

The present invention is believed to address these and other objectives by the unique and simple structures and methods disclosed herein.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention may generally be described as a reclosable bag for filling with at least one food product. The reclosable bag includes at least one sheet of web material. The sheet of web material has at least two areas of structural weakness and at least one fold structure located between and defined by the two areas of structural weakness. The reclosable bag includes an opening located generally opposite the fold structure. (Please note that fold structure as used in the specification and claims herein is to be interpreted as broadly as possible and should include not only structures that are a fold but also any structure that has the same or similar characteristics to a fold even though said structure may be formed by non-folding means or methods such as the result of joining or fusing the edges of two or more sheets of film.) In addition, the reclosable bag includes a sliding fastener structure having a skirt structure of web material extending therefrom and located within the fold structure. The skirt structure or skirt material may be either integral to the slider fastener structure or it may be coupled, e.g., sealed or adhered, to the slider fastener structure. The skirt structure includes a distal margin that is coupled to the sheet of web material at a

location between the areas of structural weakness and the opening. The web material of the reclosable fastener structure extending past the areas of structural weakness so that the reclosable fastener structure is located within the fold structure. The reclosable bag is capable of being filled with at least one food product through the opening.

The reclosable bag structure of the present invention may optionally include other features. For example, but not by way of limitation, the skirt may include an outside surface and an inside surface. The distal margin is located on the outside surface. The inside surface may include a predetermined area having a releasable adhesive material. This allows for the option of having a peelable seal, which may be used to aid in making the reclosable bag initially hermetic and may also add another reclosable/resealable feature to the bag. (Please note that the terms reclosable, resealable, and releasable, in addition to their normal meaning, are used herein, interchangeably, to describe a closed or sealed opening that may be re-opened at a predetermined time to aid in providing access to at least a portion of the contents of the bag, and then closed or sealed to allow the remaining contents to be stored in the bag for later use and/or provide evidence of tampering.)

Additionally, and more typically, the web material of the reclosable bag is substantially comprised of a predetermined portion of a roll of a parent film material. The predetermined portion having predetermined dimensions from which a reclosable bag of predetermined dimensions may be constructed. The parent film material may be manufactured to a specification which determines the shape and location of the areas of structural weakness and which makes the areas of structural weakness an integral part of the parent film. Presently, it is

believed to be commercially preferred to do so.
Alternatively, the areas of structural weakness could be
applied to the parent film at a predetermined step of the
construction or manufacturing process of the resealable
bag.

Further, the areas of structural weakness may extend
intermittently, continuously, and linearly, nonlinearly,
or in some other predetermined pattern across a
predetermined dimension of the sheet of web material.
The predetermined dimension where the area of structural
weakness is located may be either the length or the width
of the reclosable bag, which is usually rectangular in
shape, depending on whether or not it is desired to use
the long edge or side of the bag or the short edge or
side of the bag with the slider closure system. Use of
the long edge of the bag provides for a larger opening
and thus enhances the ease of access to the food material
or other materials contained within the reclosable bag.

The term structural weakness is generally used to
describe that area of the reclosable bag that is
intentionally designed to be easily torn by the consumer
to provide for evidence of tampering and to allow for
easy exposure of the zipper mechanism or assembly.
Nonetheless, it should be understood that use of the term
structural weakness should include, without limiting its
meaning, structures such as perforation, scores,
microperforations, and multiple laminate materials which
include a layer having an area of material or materials
which are specifically designed to be easily torn.
Accordingly, it should be understood that the areas of
structural weakness are intentionally designed to create
a predetermined tear path, which may or may not be
hermetic.

Also, opening of the bag may be facilitated by the

application of a tear strip (e.g., tear tape or tear string) along a predetermined surface or surfaces of the parent film. The tear strip may or may not be used in combination with a predetermined area of structural weakness.

Alternatively, the present invention may be described as a reclosable bag for filling with at least one food product and comprising at least one sheet of a web material. The sheet of web material includes a first area of structural weakness and a second area of structural weakness. (Alternatively, the areas of structural weakness may be tear areas or areas having a propensity to tear in a predetermined direction.) The sheet of web material including at least one fold structure, located between and defined by the first and second areas of structural weakness, and a fill opening. The sheet of web material further comprising a first panel coupled to the fold structure at the first area of structural weakness and a second panel coupled to the fold structure at the second area of structural weakness. A reclosable fastener structure including a male track structure and a female track structure. The male track structure including a first fin structure of web material extending therefrom and the female track structure including a second fin structure of web material extending therefrom. Each fin structure including a predetermined coupling portion. The coupling portion of the first fin structure being coupled to the first panel and the coupling portion of the second fin structure being coupled to the second panel. (please note that the seal, when it is formed, may be adjacent or near but should not be on the area of structural weakness). The reclosable fastener structure extending past the areas of structural weakness and into the fold structure. The areas of structural weakness being located below the reclosable fastener structure. The alternative

reclosable bags are also capable of being filled with at least one food product through the fill opening, which is subsequently sealed.

5 The present invention allows the fold structure to be easily removed from the reclosable bag. More importantly the present invention allows the consumer to substantially expose the reclosable fastener structure so that it is easily accessible and the consumer does not
10 have to be impeded by bag sidewalls or bag fin portions that extend up past the zipper structure. Finally, the present invention accomplishes this using but not limited to substantially one piece of film material.

15 Alternatively, the present invention may be described as a reclosable bag for filling with at least one food product. The reclosable bag may include at least one sheet of web material, at least one tear tape structure, at least one fold structure, and an opening located
20 generally opposite the fold structure. A reclosable fastener structure including at least one integral skirt structure of skirt web material extending therefrom. The integral skirt structure including at least one distal margin. The distal margin being coupled to the web material at, at least one location between the tear tape
25 structure and the opening. The reclosable fastener structure extending past the tear tape structure and into the fold structure. The reclosable bag capable of being filled with at least one food product.

30 Additionally, the reclosable bag for filling with at least one food product, may also be described as a reclosable bag including at least one sheet of web material having at least one fold structure presenting at
35 least two sidewall structures having inside surfaces, and an opening located generally opposite the fold structure. A reclosable fastener structure including an integral

skirt structure comprising a web material extending therefrom and including opposed distal margin structures. The web material of the integral skirt structure being sealed to the inside surfaces of the sidewall structures at a plurality of predetermined sealing areas. The reclosable bag may also include a barrier web material extending between and coupled to the distal margin structures.

The barrier web material of the alternative bag may alternatively extend between and be coupled to the sidewall structures. Alternatively, the barrier web material may also be coupled to predetermined sealing areas by at least one peelable seal. Alternatively, the barrier web material may include at least one area of structural weakness that extends through it along a direction generally parallel to the predetermined sealing areas.

Alternatively, the reclosable bag for filling with at least one food product of the present invention may include at least one sheet of web material having at least one predetermined tear area, at least one fold structure, and an opening located generally opposite the fold structure. A reclosable fastener structure including at least one integral skirt structure of skirt web material extending therefrom. The integral skirt structure including at least one distal margin. The distal margin being coupled to the web material at, at least one location between the tear area and the opening. The reclosable fastener structure extending past the tear area and into the fold structure. The reclosable bag capable of being filled with at least one food product.

This alternative reclosable bag structure may further include at least one piece of a header material located

in a predetermined area of the fold structure. The header material may include at least one edge structure adjacent the tear area. The reclosable bag of this alternative structure may further include at least one
5 tear tape structure coupled to the web material and adjacent to the tear area.

Alternatively, the present invention may be described as a reclosable bag for filling with at least one food
10 product. The reclosable bag may include at least one sheet of web material, at least one tear tape structure, at least one fold structure, and an opening. A reclosable fastener structure including at least one integral skirt structure of skirt web material extending
15 therefrom. The integral skirt structure including at least one distal margin. The distal margin being coupled to the web material at, at least one location between the tear tape structure and the opening. The reclosable fastener structure extending past the tear tape structure and around and over the fold structure. The reclosable
20 bag capable of being filled with at least one food product.

Additionally, the reclosable bag for filling with at least one food product, may also be described as a
25 reclosable bag including at least one sheet of web material having at least one fold structure, and an opening. A reclosable fastener structure including an integral skirt structure comprising a web material extending therefrom and including opposed distal margin
30 structures. The web material of the integral skirt structure being sealed to the outside surfaces of the sidewall structures at a plurality of predetermined sealing areas. The inside surface of the reclosable bag may also include a predetermined area having a releasable
35 adhesive material. This allows for the option of having a peelable seal, which may be used to aid in making the

bag initially hermetic and may also add another reclosable/resealable feature to the bag.

5 Additionally, the present invention may be described as
a method of construction using known form-fill-and-seal
machinery including but not limited to HFFS, VFFS, and
HFW machines. The steps of the method of construction
include 1. Folding the sheet of web material along a
10 predetermined folding area located between the areas of
structural weakness to form the fold structure. 2.
Inserting the reclosable fastener into the fold
structure. 3. Coupling the distal margin of the
integral skirt structure to the web material. 4.
15 Sealing the web material along at least two predetermined
linear areas located generally perpendicular to the fold
structure. 5. Filling the reclosable bag with at least
one food product through an opening. 6. Sealing the
opening. Please note that in an HFW application it is
20 presently believed that the step four should occur last.

The method may also include a step of inserting either a
tear tape or a tear string at least prior to step four.
Further, a header strip could also be introduced prior to
step four.

25 Alternatively, the web material may be slit along the
fold line and the reclosable fastener assembly inserted
and sealed to result in an exposed zipper structure
assembly at one end of the bag.

30 Also, alternatively, if the reclosable bag is designed to
have a gusset opposite the zipper opening then the fill
opening may be sealed and the bag may be filled with
product through the zipper opening.

35 Alternatively, the process and structure of the present
invention could include a reclosable fastener assembly

having two skirts or flaps of web material. The first skirt could be coupled or sealed to the parent film prior to folding the parent film. (Additionally, the first skirt could be tack or partially sealed prior to folding and then subsequently a full seal applied in the HFFS, VFFS, or HFW machine.) After folding the parent film the second skirt or flap would be sealed to the film sidewall located opposite the sidewall to which the first skirt is sealed or coupled. Construction of the bag could then be completed as disclosed herein.

Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a top plan view of a predetermined portion of parent film comprising a sheet of web material including at least two areas of structural weakness.

Figure 2 is an edge elevational view of a portion of the sheet of web material of Figure 1 and shows the location of the areas of structural weakness.

Figure 3 is a side elevational view of the fold structure of a reclosable bag of the present invention showing the position of the slider or zipper structure in the fold structure relative to the predetermined position of the areas of structural weakness.

Figure 4 is a perspective view of the embodiment shown in Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a front plan view of a first embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6 is a front plan view of an alternative to the first embodiment of the present invention disclosing sealed track mass 23b.

Figure 19 is a front plan view of an alternative embodiment of the present invention.

5 Figure 20 is a view from line 20--20 of Figure 19.

Figure 21 is a plan view of an alternative embodiment of the present invention illustrating various features of the invention including die cutting of the track mass of the zipper assembly and the use of a tear structure like a tear tape or a tear string.

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Figure 22 is a view from line 22--22 of Figure 21.

15 Figure 23 is a view of an alternative to the embodiment shown in Figure 22 wherein tear tape is applied to both the inside and outside surface of the bag.

Figure 24 is a cut-away view of an alternative to the embodiment shown in Figure 22 wherein the tear tape includes a tear bead.

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Figure 25 is a perspective view of the embodiment shown in Figure 24.

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Figure 26 is a cut-away view of a predetermined portion of the embodiment shown in Figure 24 illustrating the tear tape and tear bead's relationship to the film and the area of structural weakness created as a result of the presence of the tear bead.

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Figure 27 is an alternative embodiment to the structure disclosed in Figure 22.

35 Figure 28 is a plan view of an alternative embodiment of the present invention illustrating various features of the invention including the use of an optional header

strip and the use of an optional opening to assist in removal of the hood and exposure of the zipper assembly.

Figure 29 is a view from line 29--29 of Figure 28.

Figure 30 is a schematic diagram showing the components of another alternative embodiment of the present invention being fed into a machine suitable for adaptation to perform the process and make at least one of the products disclosed herein before the plow structure of the machine.

Figure 31 is a schematic diagram showing the components of another alternative embodiment of the present invention being fed into a machine suitable for adaptation to perform the process and make at least one of the products disclosed herein before the plow structure of the machine.

Figure 32 is a schematic top plan view illustrating at least one method by which the components of the alternative embodiment disclosed in Figure 30 are introduced prior to the plow mechanism of the form fill and seal machine.

Figure 33 is a schematic top plan view illustrating at least one method by which the components of the alternative embodiment disclosed in Figure 31 are introduced prior to the plow mechanism of the form fill and seal machine.

Figure 34 is a perspective view generally showing the general relationship of the components for making the various embodiments disclosed herein. Specifically, the embodiment having the peel seal tape is disclosed although after review of this disclosure it will be apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art how the

machinery may be modified to produce the various embodiments disclosed, described, and claimed herein.

5 Figure 35 is side elevational schematic view illustrating the steps of construction of the alternative embodiment disclosed in Figure 30 subsequent to folding the parent film on the plow structure.

10 Figure 36 is side elevational schematic view illustrating the steps of construction of the alternative embodiment disclosed in Figure 31 subsequent to folding the parent film on the plow structure.

15 Figure 37 is an alternative embodiment of the present invention illustrating various features of the invention including the use of tear string and a diamond shaped opening as opposed to a circular opening for assisting in the removal of the hood and exposing the zipper assembly.

20 Figure 38 is a schematic diagram showing the components of another alternative embodiment of the present invention being fed into a machine suitable for adaptation to perform the process and make the product disclosed herein, wherein either a tear string or the zipper assembly are introduced to the parent film after the plow.

25 Figure 39 is a side elevational schematic view illustrating the steps of construction of the alternative embodiment disclosed in Figure 38 wherein the tear string or slider or zipper assembly is introduced after the plow structure.

30 Figure 40 is a front plan view of an alternative embodiment of the present invention.

35 Figure 40a is a front plan view of the alternative embodiment of Figure 40, but showing a peel seal area.

Figure 41 is a view taken from line 41 - 41 of Figure 40a and showing the reclosable fastener structure extending over the fold structure and peel seal.

Figure 41a is an enlarged view of the structure shown in Figure 41 and showing the position of the slider or zipper structure over the fold structure relative to the predetermined position of the areas of structured weakness.

Detailed Description

Although the disclosure hereof is detailed and exact to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention, the physical embodiments herein disclosed merely exemplify the invention which may be embodied in other specific structures or methods. While the preferred embodiment has been described, the details may be changed without departing from the invention, which is defined by the claims.

The present invention is both a method and a structure resulting from the method. The present invention generally relates to reclosable plastic bags 100 and, more particularly, to a reclosable plastic bags 100 having a slider or zipper assembly 20, which cooperates with a tamper-evident feature. The tamper-evident feature may also be a hermetic seal feature. The method of the present invention, while unique and fully described herein, may be used on known machinery such as, by way of illustration and not by way of limitation, the rpm 100 packaging machine manufactured by Klockner Packaging Machinery of Sarasota, Florida, U.S.A. The modifications necessary to the machinery used to practice the present invention will be apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art after reading this disclosure.

Reclosable plastic bags using various zippers and sealing mechanisms are well known. However, the advantages of the present invention are believed not to be apparent from the known zippers and sealing mechanism of the prior art. The zipper assembly 20 typically includes a zipper structure 20a and an integral skirt 16. In the present invention, the skirt 16 is bonded to the parent film 10 at a predetermined seal location 14. See Figure 3.

Referring to Figures 1-5, the method and structure of the present invention may begin to be generally described. Referring to Figure 1 a predetermined portion of the parent film 10 is illustrated. The parent film 10, at predetermined locations, is structurally weakened, e.g., by the use of presently known laser scoring technology.

Referring to Figure 2, an elevational edge view of the parent film 10 including the score lines 12 may be seen. The weakened area 12 may also be imperforate and hermetic. The weakened areas 12 define an integral tear off portion or fold structure 11.

Referring to Figure 3, the film 10 is folded over, as shown, to form the fold structure 11 and a zipper assembly 20 is inserted. Weakened areas 12 are preferably positioned below the zipper structure 20a so that when fold structure or hood 11 is removed the zipper structure 20a is exposed sufficiently above the resulting fin structures 19 to allow the user access to the zipper structure 20a. Zipper skirts 16 are shown bonded to the film 10. However, it is presently believed preferable, prior to insertion of the zipper assembly 20, that the uncut ends 23 (see Figure 5) of each zipper assembly 20 be punched out or cut to form a radiused notch 22a, as shown in Figure 7. The cut zipper assembly ends 22 are sealed together (the sealed mass 22b of Figure 7) which

will later function to retain the contents of the bag 100 such as food.

Referring back to Figure 3, the skirt(s) 16 remain intact so that the zipper assembly 20 is kept continuous for ease of handling. Once inserted the skirt(s) 16 of the zipper assembly 20 is bonded to the inside surface 10a of the parent film 10 at seal location(s) 14.

Next sides 30 and 32 are sealed, along margin 10c illustrated in Figures 5 or 7, using a known mechanism such as a heat-sealing bar of a form fill and seal machine by advancing the folded film 10 to the heat sealing bar portion of the machine used; creating a seal 30a across the length and width of margin 10c. The resulting bag 100 is then filled with a predetermined foodstuff or other desired material through the opening 33 located, opposite the zipper assembly 20, at bottom edge 34 shown in Figure 5 or 7. Then bottom edge 34 is subsequently sealed, forming seal 34a.

This results in the zipper assembly 20 being hermetically sealed within the tear off portion 11. Tear off portion 11 is integral to the parent film 10. Integral tear off portion 11 may be easily removed by tearing along the score lines 12, leaving the zipper structure 20a fully exposed and easily accessible for the use desired.

The above noted process and mechanism may also be performed so that the zipper assembly 20 is located along one of the long sides 30 or 32 of the bag 100 rather than the short side of the rectangle, which is defined by the bag 100.

Referring to Figure 5, a second embodiment of the present invention 1 is illustrated. As may be seen from Figure 5 two bags 100 are shown prior to their being separated

along seam 101. This embodiment includes score lines 12 laid out in an alternative pattern that includes curve or arcuate section 13 and tear notch 24. As further disclosed in Figure 7 the parent film 10 is sealed at section 26 to either its opposing sides 35 and 36 or the structure of the zipper assembly 20. The tear notch 24 provides a starting point for removing the fold structure 11, which is located above the zipper assembly 20. The fold structure 11 being defined by the location of the score lines 12. The score lines 12 extending along curve 13 to a predetermined area below the zipper assembly 20 for substantially the entire width of the reclosable bag 100 facilitating removal of the hood or fold structure 11 and exposure of the zipper structure 20a. The embodiment of Figure 5 further including a hermetic seal 40.

Referring now to Figure 8, a cross-sectional view of the embodiment of Figure 7 may be seen. In particular, the integral skirt 16, usually comprised of two strips on pieces of plastic film or a one-piece unit of continuous film, may be seen to have its outside surface 19 sealed hermetically to the inside surfaces 36a and 35a at respective hermetic seals 40a and 40. Additionally, a peelable seal 50 is located at the bottom of the skirt 16. Any standard commercially known resealable adhesive 51 may be used to make the peel seal 50. The peel seal 50 may also be a hermetic seal 40b.

Referring now to Figure 9 an alternative to the embodiment of Figure 8 is shown. In this embodiment the zipper skirt 16 is heat sealed to the side panels 36 and 35 respectively of the parent film 10. The inside surfaces 17 of the zipper skirt 16 are peelable sealed to one another, using a known releasable adhesive 51, to provide a releasable hermetic or gas tight seal 50 therebetween. It should be noted that the term's resealable adhesive or releasable adhesive as used herein

should be construed interchangeably as well as given their common meaning.

Referring now to Figure 10 another alternative embodiment of Figure 8 is shown. In this embodiment the parent film 10 is sealed along a predetermined portion 42 of inside surface 35a and 36a. A known releasable adhesive 51 is used to form a peelable seal 50 between inside surfaces 35a and 36a at predetermined portion 42. US Patent No. 4,944,409 contains an example of such an adhesive. Presently, CUREX brand grade 4482-0, supplied by Curwood of Oshkosh, Wisconsin is considered an acceptable adhesive for use with this embodiment of the present invention.

Referring now to Figures 11 and 12 another alternative embodiment is illustrated wherein the peelable seal 50 is comprised of a peel seal tape 53 having a permanent sealant like a metallocene catalyzed polyethylene located on one side and a releasable seal material like the aforesaid CUREX brand material on the other side (side 54).

One possible method for achieving the structure of Figure 11 and 12 is the use of a form fill and seal machine system in which the peel seal tape 53 would be tacked onto a predetermined location of the parent film 10 prior to the plow 200. (See Figures 31, 33, and 34 for a general illustration of the location of the plow 200 in relationship to the other components of a form fill and seal machine. Please note with reference to Figure 33 that it is presently believed preferable for heat sealer bar 208 to be enlarged sufficiently so that in addition to sealing the tear tape 120 is place it also seals the permanent seal side of the peel seal tape 53 in place at the same time. Accordingly, while one sealer bar 208 is believed preferable for these separate functions multiple

bars could be used, each having a dedicated function or a combination of functions). After the plow 200 the peelable sealant side 54 would be sealed to the parent film 10 by heat sealer bars 55. Use of sealer bars 208 and 55 as disclosed herein allows independent temperatures and pressures to be used for each seal and it is believed that more consistent peel seals will result.

10 Additionally, the zipper skirt 16 may be sealed in place subsequent to the plow 200 by sealer bar 56 and the header seal 206a may be made by sealer bar 57 as illustrated generally in Figures 34 and 36.

15 Referring now to Figure 13 another alternative embodiment of Figure 10 is shown. In this embodiment, the zipper skirt 16 includes an elongated section 16a. End 21 of elongated section 16a is positioned between the inside surfaces 36a and 35a of the side panels 36 and 35 of the parent film 10. The elongated section 16a is heat sealed to the parent film 10 on inside surface 35a and peelable sealed using a known releasable adhesive 51 to inside surface 36a to form peel seal 50.

20 Referring now to Figure 14 a third embodiment of the present invention is disclosed. Again, two bags 100 are shown prior to their being separated along seam 101. The invention of the third embodiment is comprised of parent film 10, which is used to form the bag 100 that is to be filled. The bag 100 includes a first side seal 30, a second side seal 32, and a fill opening 33. Side panel 35 forms the front side of the bag 100. The fill opening 33, after the bag 100 is formed and filled with a predetermined type of food material, is heat sealed to form bottom edge or seal 34. The bag 100 further includes a fold structure 11, header 15, integral zipper skirt 16, a zipper assembly 20 including a zipper

structure 20a, at least one hermetic seal 40, an unsealed area 60, and a section 62 where the zipper skirt 16 and the ends 23 of the zipper assembly 20 are heat sealed together (see sealed mass 23b in Figure 14) prior to their insertion between the front side 35 and the back side 36 of the film 10. This forms sealed mass 23b. The formation of sealed mass 23b may take place at sealer 216, which is illustrated in Figure 30.

Sealing zipper skirt(s) 16 to the parent film 10 forms the hermetic or gas tight seal 40. The zipper skirts 16 may have a predetermined portion or portions that extend past seal 40 and which may be held together with a peel seal 50. See for example, Figure 15.

Since, within the unsealed area 60, the side panels 35 and 36 are not attached to the zipper assembly 20, the hood structure 11 (which may be defined by the score lines 12) may be easily removed to expose zipper structure 20a. The sealed mass 23b provides for containment of product when the peelable seal 50 is opened.

Referring to Figure 15 a view from line 15--15 of Figure 14 may be seen. This may be seen to be identical to the embodiment of Figure 8, except as explained above with reference to Figure 14.

Referring now to Figure 16 an alternative structure to the one shown in Figure 15 may be seen. In this alternative, the zipper skirt 16 is made of one piece of material. It is heat sealed to the inside surfaces 35a and 36a to form hermetic seals 40 and 40a. The skirt 16 is provided with a structural weakness 45 which extends linearly and generally parallel to hermetic seals 40 and 40a along the zipper skirt 16. The structural weakness 45 is designed to fracture or tear relatively easily when

the customer opens the bag 100.

Referring now to Figure 17, an alternative to the embodiment shown in Figure 16 may be seen. In this embodiment the zipper skirt 16 includes a barrier film section 16b. The barrier film 16b is applied (preferably by heat sealing although other methods could be used, e.g., Adhesive coupling, ultrasonic or high frequency sealing technology) to the inside surface 16d of the zipper skirt 16. The zipper skirt 16 is heat sealed along a predetermined portion of its outside surface 16e to parent film 10 to form a hermetic seal 40. The barrier film section 16b is releasably sealed to the inside surface 16d to form at least one peel type seal 50. Note that it is presently believed that section 16b must have a surface 16c that is resistant to heat sealing.

Referring now to Figure 18 an alternative to the embodiment shown in Figure 17 may be seen. In this embodiment barrier film section 16b is heat sealed to a separate predetermined portion of the inside surfaces 35a and 36a of the parent film 10. To form two additional hermetic seals 40 located below the hermetic seals 40 of the zipper skirt 16. The barrier film 16b is provided with a structural weakness at 45 which extends linearly and generally parallel to hermetic seals 40. The structural weakness is designed to fracture or tear relatively easily when the customer opens the bag 100.

Alternatively, the structure of Figure 17 could be provided with a structural weakness 45 as described with reference to Figure 18. In such a case peel seal 50 would be replaced with a permanent seal.

Referring to Figures 19 and 20, header strip 206, located between the front side 35 and back side 36 of the parent

film material 10, of a predetermined size have sufficient width to extend down to, preferably just above, a tear line 132 (area of structural weakness). The header strip 206 terminates at edge(s) 131. This tear line 132 has the predetermined propensity to tear in predetermined way. The extension of the header strip material 206 extends down so that it is adjacent to the tear line 132. This facilitates tearing off the hood structure 11 from the bag 100 along the tear line 132. The optional tear notch 134 facilitates initiation of the tear, the tear line 132 (the oriented parent film 10 or film 10 with the propensity to tear) directs the tear, and the header material 206, which is bonded or sealed to the front side 35 and back side 36 of the parent film 10, controls the tear so that the zipper structure 20a is consistently clear of the parent film material 10 after the removal of the hood structure 11.

Alternatively, if the header material 206 is made of an oriented polypropylene having at least one side with a heat sealable sealant then the parent film 10 would not need to be oriented or have the tear line 132 or propensity to tear. Presently, it is believed preferable that if the header material 206 is made of an oriented polypropylene then the oriented polypropylene should have both its sides coated with a heat sealable sealant. Also, alternatively, a plurality of header strips 206 could be used instead of a single integral header strip 206. In either case, the parent film 10 would not necessarily need to be oriented or have a tear line 132 or a propensity to tear.

Referring to Figures 21 and 22, at least one but preferably two pieces of tear tape 120, located between the front side 35 and back side 36 of the parent film material 10 on film surfaces 35a and 36a, of a predetermined size are bonded or sealed to the parent

film 10 of the hood structure 11 adjacent, preferably just above, a tear line 132 (area of structural weakness). This tear line 132 has the predetermined propensity to tear in predetermined way. The tear tape material 120 adjacent the tear line 132 facilitates tearing off the hood structure 11 from the bag 100 along the tear line 132 in a controlled manner. The optional tear notch 134 facilitates initiation of the tear, the tear line 132 (the oriented parent film or film with the propensity to tear) directs the tear, and the tear tape 120, which is bonded or sealed to the front side 35 and back side 36 of the parent film 10, controls the tear so that the zipper structure 20a is consistently clear of the parent film material 10 after the removal of the hood structure 11. Alternatively, if the tear tape material 120 is made of an oriented polypropylene having at least one side with a heat sealable sealant then the parent film 10 would not necessarily need to be oriented or have the tear line 132 or propensity to tear.

With respect to facilitating removal of hood or fold 11 it should be understood that instead of score lines 12 the parent film 10 may be weakened in predetermined areas using other procedures as well, including but not limited to scoring or the use of multi-ply laminate film having a predetermined weakened area or the addition of a tear assistance structure, e.g., Tear tape 120 or tear string 120a. The tear assistance structure may be added for use by itself or in conjunction with a predetermined area of structural weakness 12 to aid in the tearing of the film 10. See Figures 28 and 29.

Referring to Figure 23 another alternative to the embodiment disclosed in Figure 22 is disclosed. In this embodiment tear tape 120 is applied to both the inside surfaces 36a and 35a and the outside surfaces 36 and 35 of the bag 100. In this embodiment no score line or

weakening 132 is believed necessary (although such an area of structural weakness could be used) since the tear tape 120 located on both the inside and outside surfaces of the bag 100 will act as an effective tear guide.

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Referring to Figures 24, 25, and 26 another alternative to the embodiment shown in Figure 22 is illustrated. In this embodiment a modified tear tape 120b having a tear bead 120c is used.

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As Figures 24-26 illustrate, when the film 10 is sealed to the tear tape 120b the bead 120c is depressed into the film 10 creating an area of structural weakness 12 without requiring prescoring or other modification of the parent film 10 prior to the application of the tear tape 120b. This structure is believed beneficial because the tear tape 120b is always in alignment with the area of structural weakness 12.

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Referring to Figure 27 another alternative to the embodiment disclosed in Figure 22 is disclosed. In this embodiment tear tape 120 is applied to both the inside surfaces 36a and 35a and the outside surfaces 36 and 35 of the bag 100. The tear tape 120 is applied to border both sides of the score line or weakening 132. Since the tear tape 120 is located on both sides of the score line 132 and on the inside and outside surfaces of the bag 100 a very consistent controlled or guided will be achieved.

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Tear tape 120 is interchangeable with tear string 120a. Accordingly, a tear string 120a could be substituted for the tear tape 120. See, e.g., Figures 38 and 39. Preferably, the tear tape 120 or the tear string 120a used is made from a material, e.g., Thermoplastic material, that is compatible with the film 10 and which may be sealed, coupled, or bonded to the film 10. For example, the tear tape 120 or tear string 120a may be

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formed of polyethylene or may be encased in polyethylene. It is understood in the art that a tear string, such as tear string 120a, may have various cross-sectional shapes, e.g., Round, square, triangular, etc., which may be used to enhance its ability to tear the parent film material 10.

In particular, referring to Figures 30, 32, and 35, the process by which the alternative embodiment having tear tape 120 is presently believed to be manufacturable is illustrated using an rpm 100 machine. The parent film 10 is fed over a predetermined number of rollers and toward the plow structure 200. The parent film 10 after passing over dancer roller 203a is die punched by die 210 to present parallel openings 121. It is presently believed that the film 10 must pass over the dancer rollers 203a so that they are kept sufficiently taught thus allowing openings 121 to be punched out accurately at predetermined positions, by die 210, such that the positions of the openings 121 are always at the same or a uniform distance from each other. In addition to the parent film 10 two rolls of tear tape 120 are feed over the parent film 10 and in parallel alignment with the parallel openings 121 such that the tear tape 120 preferably, but not necessarily, bisects each the parallel opening 121. Tear string 120a could be substituted for tear tape 120. See, e.g., Figures 38 and 39.

In addition, referring back to Figures 30, 32, and 35, optionally a header material 206 may be fed over the parent film 10. Further, the zipper or slider assembly 20 is also fed over the parent film 10. Prior to being fed over the parent film 10 the zipper assembly 20 has a notch 22a die punched, by die 214 and heat sealed by sealer 216, at a predetermined position that is also designed to be in general alignment with the parallel

openings 121. Once the tear tape 120 is presented over the parent film 10 but before it is passed over the plow 200 it passes over a tear tape sealer mechanism 208 so that the tear tape 120 is sealed to the parent film 10. Alternatively, the tear tape 120 could be tacked in place and subsequently sealed to the parent film 10 either before or after the plow 200.

The parallel openings 121 may be of any shape although circular is the shape that is presently preferred. Diamond shaped cuts could be used to further enhance initiation of the tear in the parent film 10. See Figure 37.

Additionally, the notch 22a as generally illustrated herein may be of an arcuate or radiused shape but the notch 22a could also be made at a sharp angle such as a 90° angle. See Figure 37. The sharper angle is presently believed to add more stress to the structure of the zipper assembly 20 and therefore a radiused structure is presently considered to be preferred. However, the present invention should not be interpreted as being limited to solely a radiused notch 22a as generally illustrated herein.

After the parent film 10 is folded the remaining manufacturing process is carried out as generally illustrated in Figure 35. The zipper skirts 16 are sealed to the respective sides of the parent film 10 at seal 14. The header strip 206, if used, is sealed to the parent film 10 at seal 206a. The side seal 30a is made, which also seals the perimeter or edge 121a of opening 121. (note, if no tear tape 120 or tear string 120a is used then it is presently considered best to add a tear notch 24 to the opening 121 to facilitate removal of the hood 11.) An opening 123 is die punched in the package 100 to provide a point where the package 100 may be

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easily hung for display purposes. The package 100 is then cut along seam 101 from the V-fold portion of the form fill and seal machine and transferred to the fill and seal stations where fill opening 33 is opened and the package 100 is filled and gas is flushed through the fill opening 33. Opening 33 is then hermetically sealed at seal 34a.

Alternatively, referring to Figure 38 and Figure 39 the zipper assembly 20 may be introduced subsequent to the plow structure 200. The parent film 10, prior to being fed over the rollers 202 is still die punched by die 210 to present parallel openings 121. Also, alternatively, the tear tape 120 or tear string 120a may be feed over the parent film 10 and in parallel alignment with the parallel openings 121 subsequent to the plow 200. See Figures 38 and 39. Again, the tear tape 120 or tear string 120a preferably, but not necessarily, bisects each parallel opening 121. Also, while Figure 39 shows both the tear string 120a and skirts 16 of the zipper assembly 20 being introduced to the parent film 10 subsequent to the plow 200 and respectively sealed by sealer bars 208 and 209 it should be understood that either the tear string 120a or the zipper assembly 20 could be introduced before the plow 200. For example, the zipper assembly 20 could be introduced after the plow 200 and the tear string 120a prior to the plow 200. Since tear tape 120 is interchangeable with the tear string 120a it will be apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art reading this disclosure that the tear tape 120 could also be introduced after the plow 200 and used in essentially the same manner as the tear string 120a.

The openings 121 are provided, at a minimum, to facilitate access to the tear tape 120 or the tear string 120a and to facilitate tearing and removal of the hood 11 to expose the zipper assembly 20.

Additionally, the present invention may be used in combination with other VFFS and HFFS machines. The present invention could also be used with HFW machines.

5 However, in using either VFFS machines or HFFS machines the method of the present invention is presently believed to require post-compression (commonly called post-squashing) of a predetermined portion of the track structures 20b, with respect to the embodiment shown in
10 Figure 6. (sometimes also referred to as track mass 20b, herein) of the slider closure assembly 20 located within a margin or line 10b of the parent film 10 where a seal 30a, especially a hermetic seal, is desired. Alternatively, the track mass 20b may have a pre-compressed portion located with margin 10b. Neither pre-compression nor post-compression are believed to be
15 required where a notch, e.g., 22a of Figure 7, has been punched out or cut from the zipper assembly 20. However, if pre-compression is desired then this is accomplished in the present invention at sealer 216 shown in Figure
20 30. This is so that when, on either a HFFS or VFFS machine, the track mass 20b (with the slider or zipper structure 20a avoided) passes through the package side seal zone portion of either the machine a consistent
25 hermetic seal 30a is produced by the application of the heater bars of the machine used. As will be apparent to a person of ordinary skill in the art from this disclosure, if a notch, e.g., notch 22a of Figure 7, is cut from the zipper assembly 20 then there is no
30 structure or mass for sealer 216 to pre-compress and sealer 216 will then only provide seal 22b of the cut end 22, as shown in Figure 7.

In applications using HFW machines for the manufacture of
35 the embodiment shown in Figure 5, such as Jones Automation Company machines, it is not believed necessary to pre-compress, post-compress, or squash a predetermined

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portion of the track mass 20b. HFW machines have a rotary jaw assembly, which includes a hinged side. The jaw assembly provides at least two advantages, either of which, separately or in combination, eliminates the need for pre-compression of the track mass 20b. First, the jaw assembly provides a relatively long time, longer than the time provided by either VFFS or HFFS machines, for the application of heat and pressure sufficient to form the desired seal 30a. Second, the portion of the track mass 20b that is targeted to be fused or sealed (generally located within the boundary of margin 10b) is placed or fed into the jaw assembly so that it is placed toward and near the hinged portion of the jaw assembly and thus maximum mechanical advantage and force may be applied to the predetermined portion of the track mass 20b.

If either the longer seal time or the mechanical advantage of the jaw assembly of the HFW machine was not available then, referring to Figure 6, since there is generally insufficient room on an HFW machine to pre-compress the track mass 20b, the track mass 20b may be pre-punched with a die at the predetermined location 22a (where the seal 30a is also to be applied or created) prior to insertion into the fold 11 of the parent film 10. Since the pre-punched area or notch 22a would be synchronized to be in registration with the portion of the folded parent film 10 that is to be sealed, less energy (time, temperature, and/or pressure), due to the reduced mass to be sealed is required to consistently obtain the type of seal 30a desired. (note, pre-punching rather than pre-compression could also be used with HFFS or VFFS machines.)

Referring now to Figures 40, 40a, 41 and 41a, an alternate embodiment of the present invention may be seen. The film 10 is folded over, as shown, to form the

fold structure 11, and a zipper assembly 20 is positioned over the fold structure 11. Weakened areas 12 are preferably positioned below the zipper structure 20a, so that when the zipper structure 20a is in the open position the fold structure 11 and its weakened areas 12 are exposed to allow the user access to the fold structure 11. Seen particularly in Figure 41, the overlaying zipper skirt 16, of the alternate embodiment may be viewed. Zipper skirt 16 is usually comprised of two strips of pieces of plastic film or a one-piece unit of continuous film, and is seen to have its inside surfaces 17 sealed hermetically to the outside surfaces 35b, 36b of the film 10 at respective hermetic seals 40c, 40d. The fold structure 11 is preferably designed to act as an imperforate hermetic barrier to protect the contents of bag 100. Tearing the fold structure 11 allows the user access to the contents and also provides visual evidence that the hermetic seal is broken. Seen particularly in Figures 40a and 41, the inside surfaces 35a, 36a of the parent film 10 may also be peelably sealed to one another, using a known releasable adhesive 51, to provide a releasable hermetic or gas tight seal 50 therebetween. The seal 50 is located adjacent, preferably just below, the weakened areas 12.

As best seen in Figures 40 and 40a, two bags 100 are shown prior to their being separated along seam 101. The alternate embodiment seen in these views is comprised of parent film 10, which is used to form the bag 100 to be filled. The bag 100 further includes a header 15, and a peg hole 15a, seen in this embodiment at the end opposite the fold 11. It is presently believed preferable, after the folding and sealing of parent film 10 that the parent film 10 be punched out to form a tear area 24a. The parent film is then sealed around the perimeter of the punched out tear area 24a and a tear notch 24 is added, as seen in Figure 40. These steps are preferably

performed before the attachment of the zipper assembly 20 and zipper skirt(s) 16. Following this, the zipper assembly 20 is positioned and bonded to the outside surfaces 35b, 36b, of the parent film 10, and over the fold 11. Alternately, the parent film 10 may be sealed around the perimeter to include the sealed perimeter of the punched out tear area 24a so that after the punching step which forms tear area 24a, the sealed perimeter remains. The tear notch 24 provides a starting point for removing the fold structure 11, which is surrounded by the zipper assembly 20 and attached zipper skirt 16. Further, at least one piece of tear tape 120, located between the front side 35 and back side 36 of the parent film 10 on film surfaces 35a, 36a, of a predetermined size may be bonded or sealed to the parent film 10 at the fold 11. The tear tape 120 is located adjacent, preferably just above, a tear line 132 (area of structural weakness). This tear line 132 has the predetermined propensity to tear in a predetermined way. The tear tape material 120 adjacent the tear line 132 facilitates tearing off the fold structure 11 from the bag 100. The aforementioned tear notch 24 facilitated initiation of the tear.

Referring to Figures 41 and 41a, the skirt(s) 16 remain intact so that the zipper assembly 20 is kept continuous for ease of handling. Once positioned over the punched fold structure 11, the skirt(s) 16 of the zipper assembly 20 is bonded to the outside surfaces 35b, 36b of the parent film 10 at seal location(s) 40c, 40d. Next, sides 30 and 32 are sealed, along margin 10c illustrated in Figure 40, using a known mechanism such as a heatsealing bar of a form fill and seal machine (as described earlier in the present application) by advancing the film 10 to the heat sealing bar portion of the machine to be used.

It will be apparent to the person of ordinary skill in

the art after reading this disclosure that the present
alternate embodiment shown in Figures 40, 40a, and 41,
41a may be manufactured using the methodology previously
disclosed herein with the necessary modifications, which
5 this specification makes apparent to a person of skill in
the art.

The foregoing is considered as illustrative only of
the principles of the invention. Furthermore, since
10 numerous modifications and changes will readily
occur to those skilled in the art, it is not desired
to limit the invention to the exact construction and
operation shown and described.

FIG. 40a